Editorial: Difference

Claudia Hopkins, "Editorial: Difference," *Art in Translation*, 2016, Vol. 8.4, 389-392

[published 1 January 2017]

As 2016 draws to a close, it has been declared by many both on the left and the right as a year that "turned the world upside down,"[1] or changed it "beyond recognition,"[2] citing as evidence an unexpected Brexit, the US presidential election of a man who has called for a wall to be erected between Mexico and the United States, the general backlash against political correctness, the ongoing crisis in Syria, terror from Isis, the rise of nationalism, and racial tensions across the Western world. The centrality of "difference" to the events of 2016—in terms of religious, national, ethnic, class, or gender identity—is obvious.

To end 2016, *Art in Translation* marks its final issue with a timely selection of articles that reflect on issues of difference and inequality in earlier, different contexts, but which resonate with current concerns surrounding ethnic, racial, and cultural differences.

The first two articles, originally written in Portuguese in 1904 and 1949, are of historiographical significance. Their authors, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues and Arthur Ramos, are founding figures of anthropology in Brazil. Both collected African and Afro-Brazilian artifacts which gave them an authoritative position for analysis. Ramos's collection can be accessed today at the Arthur Ramos Museum at the Federal University of Ceará in Fortaleza in northeastern Brazil, which has kindly provided the illustrations for the Ramos essay.

Written in 1904, Nina Rodrigues's essay *"*The Fine Arts of the Black Settlers of Brazil—Sculpture" was the first serious attempt to explain the artistic practices introduced by African slaves to Brazil and continued by their descendants. His essay is all the more groundbreaking because, as Roberto Conduro points out in his introduction, such Afro-Brazil artifacts were classified as criminal evidence of the religious practice of *Candomblé*, which was declared illegal in late nineteenth-century Brazil. Nina Rodrigues regarded African and Afro-Brazilian cult objects as fine art and worthy of attention. Yet, for all his appreciation and openness towards African-Brazilian practices, he was still and perhaps inevitably caught up with the racial prejudices of the period, which aligned people of African origin with a childish mentality and their art with primitivism. For Nina Rodrigues, Afro-Brazil artifacts cannot be judged by the same standards used for "the evaluation of art products in civilized nations," as he considered them to be in a gestational phase, as gems "crying out to be polished and cut."

Forty-five years later, building on Rodrigues's work and the writings of European and North American ethnographers, Arthur Ramos argued against the clichéd view of Afro-Brazilians as unable to develop a sophisticated art and culture. His discussion of Afro-Brazilian artifacts tackles a range of issues, including the debt of modern Western artists to African culture—art, music, dance, folklore—the impact of European missions on African art, acculturation, syncretism, and the suppression suffered by Afro-Brazilians at the hands of white slave masters. His description of the resulting "complex of inferiority" of Afro-Brazilians resonates with the theory of negative representation through which colonized or enslaved peoples have seen themselves, as outlined by W.E.B. DuBois in the early twentieth century and Frantz Fanon in the 1950s and 1960s.[3]

Readers interested in the reception of African art should also look at related articles published in previous issues of *Art in Translation.* For instance, the essays written by Vladimir Markov ("Negro Art," 1919) and Leo Frobenius ("Ancient and Recent African Art," 1912), published in the journal in 2009, offer insights into the early twentieth-century reception of African art.[4] Vladimir Markov, "Negro Art," *Art in Translation* 1, no 1 (2009): 77–117, first published in Russian as "Iskusstvo Negrov," in *Negro Art* (1919): 3–44; and Leo Frobenius, "Ancient and Recent African Art," *Art in Translation* 1, no 2 (2009): 189–197, first published in German as "Alte und junge Afrikanische Kunst," *Die Kunstwelt* (1912): 97–114.View all notes In addition, a special issue of *Art in Translation* (December 2010) offers a selection of voices on African art from the 1950s onward, with texts by the filmmaker Chris Marker, the art historian Jean Laude, and Yacouba Konaté, curator of Dak'art, the biennale of contemporary African art in Dakar, Senegal, in 2006.[5]

Returning to the contents of this issue, two recent articles (2013) by the late German art historian Victoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff (1944–2013) shift the focus to several contemporary non-European artists whose work engages with issues of race, gender, and colonial history. In line with recent developments in postcolonial theory, Schmidt-Linsenhoff's analysis does not approach the issue of "otherness" in oppositional terms (man/woman; East/West; North/South) but aims to reveal the ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions that result from cultural encounters across world history and societies. Her discussion of female artists from Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine, including Gülsün Karamustafa and Mona Hatoum among others, reveals their ambiguous position from which they critique well-established patriarchal clichés of the "oriental" woman and the "veil" both in the West as well as in their countries of origin.

Schmidt-Linsenhoff's other essay focuses on the installation art of the Beninese artist Georges Adéagbo (born in 1942). As Daniela Hammer-Tugendthat aptly states in her introduction to this essay, Adéagbo's rhizome-like installations—composed of heterogeneous found objects that respect no hierarchy of high or low culture, past or modern times, African or Western origins, and spread across walls and floors of exhibition spaces—represent "the whole miscellaneous hotchpotch of this globalized world." Schmidt-Linsenhoff's essay shows how Adéagbo's success in the West depended on preconceived clichés of a "magic art," on relating his self-archiving to contemporary trends in Western art, and on Western models of interpretation that read his art as a critique of colonialism. From such Western-centric perspectives, Schmidt-Linsenhoff attempts to shift the reader's view back to the place of production, to Cotonou in West Africa, in order to reveal the subtleties of Adéagbo's practice.

Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, little known in the English-speaking world, was a prolific writer and influential figure in advancing postcolonial and gender studies in German art history. Her scholarship should be taken into account in any future attempt to write the historiography of feminist and postcolonial art history.

The final text in this issue addresses "difference" and "inequality" not from a postcolonial perspective, but from a social left-wing point of view in relation to architectural practice. Writing in 1970, in the aftermath of the events of 1968, the Austrian architect Ottokahr Uhl points to the social inequality in the aesthetic conception of buildings: it empowers the architect-genius and a small number of privileged people, but often excludes the actual consumer of architecture. Uhl's theoretical essay argues for an emancipation of these consumers and their participation in the planning process. His argument for a

"democratization of aesthetics" and its translation into practice turned him into an outsider figure in the Viennese world of architecture at the time, yet his ideas about participatory architecture are still relevant today.[6]

Claudia Hopkins
Editor

Notes

1. Susan Chira, "The Year 2016 in Pictures," *The New York Times*, 27 December 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/22/sunday-review/2016-year-in-pictures.html?_r=0; and Dekka Aitkenhead, "So Long, 2016: The Year of the Political Earthquake," *The Guardian*, 24 December 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/dec/24/2016-in-review-world-news-syria-terrorism-brexit-trump-decca-aitkenhead

2. David Chazan, Peter Foster, Rory Mulhulland, et al., "2016 in Review. World Events that Changed History," *The Daily Telegraph*, 31 December 2016. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/31/2016-review-world-events-changed-history/

3. W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, 1903); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968, originally published in French 1961); and Franz Fanon, *Peau Noir, Masques Blancs* (Paris: Les Éditions du Seuil, 1952).

4. Vladimir Markov, "Negro Art," *Art in Translation* 1, no 1 (2009): 77–117, first published in Russian as "Iskusstvo Negrov," in *Negro Art* (1919): 3–44; and Leo Frobenius, "Ancient and Recent African Art," *Art in Translation* 1, no 2 (2009): 189–197, first published in German as "Alte und junge Afrikanische Kunst," *Die Kunstwelt* (1912): 97–114.

5. *Art in Translation* 5, no 4 (December 2013), is dedicated to the reception of African art. It includes: Chris Marker, "The Statues Also Die" (voiceover for the film *Les Statues Meurent Aussi*, directed by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, 1950–3); Jean Laude, "Introduction to *French Painting (1905–1914) and 'Negro Art'*" ("Introduction: Le problème," *La peinture française et l'art nègre (1905–1914). Contribution a l'étude des sources du fauvisme et du cubisme*, Paris, 1968. Éditions Klincksieck, new edition 2006); and Yacouba Konaté, "Dak'Art: The Making of Pan-Africanism and the Contemporary" ("Dak'Art: La fabrique de Panafricanisme et de Contemporain," *La Biennale de Dakar*, 2009).

6. Maria Welzig, Gerhard Steixner, *Die Architektur und ich: eine Bilanz der österreichischen Architektur seit 1945 übermittelt durch ihre Protagonisten* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2003), 161.